

Episode 5

13 / Sanctuary

Saundra Boone shoved open the heavy wooden door of Resurrection Cathedral and stepped inside. The door slammed shut behind her cutting off the incessant sounds of New York City. She was at the church to continue her interview with the rector, Henry McAllen, but she was early, so she took a few moments to appreciate the quietness of the sanctuary.

Sunlight filtered in through the stained glass windows on either side of the door, and dust motes swirled in the multicolored shafts. Four stained glass windows depicting scenes from the Bible adorned either side of the auditorium, but barely any light came through them, as the tall brick office buildings on either side of the church blocked out the sun's rays. The wooden pews looked tired and worn.

Saundra swiped the screen on her iPhone and checked the time. She had ten minutes until her interview began. The rector, who was also an American history professor at Boston University, had said he would be in his office in the back of the church.

The pew groaned as Saundra sat down to review her notes from her first discussion with the rector regarding his historical research. As the new acquisitions editor of Hancock Press, Saundra spent her days reviewing book pitches sent to her by agents, commissioning writers, soliciting manuscripts, deciding which ones were good enough to publish, coordinating cover designs, and writing promotional copy. Eleven months ago, after hearing McAllen give a lecture titled "The Other Constitution" — regarding a secret convention that was held by thirteen of the dissenting delegates to the Constitutional Convention — she thought the topic intriguing enough to request a copy of his research.

"I doubt the majority of the public would be interested in such mundane history," Henry had said as he handed her a thick manuscript detailing his discoveries. "I'm just into obscure history, that's all. It's in my family genes. Both my mother and father were historians."

Saundra had just smiled at that as she thought of her mother, Ginny, who was an archaeologist and had wanted her daughter to follow in her footsteps. But, despite Henry's modest words, Saundra found herself riveted by his research. Just the ideas he had presented could form the basis of a great story — even if it weren't a true one, but the painstaking detail made the historical narrative Henry had fleshed out in his document ring true. On top of that, Saundra felt that the social climate in the United States made the public ripe for this kind of material. She felt she had a bestseller on her hands.

After presenting the ideas to her publishing team at Hancock, they agreed to commission Henry to shape his research into a book for publishing the following year. Now that the book was finished, Saundra was even more eager to have it released so she had bumped up the street date by three weeks. She had conducted her first in-depth interview with Henry a week ago at his church which was within walking distance of the 1200 block of Avenue of the Americas where the Hancock Press headquarters were located.

Now sitting in the back pew of the empty Resurrection Cathedral, Saundra read some of Henry's answers to her previous questions. The purpose of the interviews was to provide easy fodder for the media. One point in particular she wanted to follow up with Henry on today.

"You'd be surprised to know that the thirteen dissenters were also worried about the Constitution for religious reasons," Henry had said. "Many of them were Christians of different stripes — some Anglicans, some Baptists, a couple Quakers, even a Catholic. They were concerned that with the union of the thirteen colonies into one nation the government would try to manipulate the various denominations or unify them into one church. The last thing they wanted was a governmental leader who was the head of the church like they had in England — and still do. They wanted a way to restore the proper separation of the government's influence from the churches' influence if need be. That's part of the reason they designed the document called the Correction."

"Is there any possibility that the document is still in existence today?" Saundra had asked.

"Oh, I think it is," Henry had said. "I've run into a few dead ends looking for it myself....Perhaps, this book will create a greater interest in it, and spur people who have better resources and connections than I do to look for it."

Time to go thought Saundra as she glanced at the clock on her iPhone again. She checked the battery power on her digital audio recording device and hurried to the door on the right side of the raised platform which held an ornate podium, a choir box, and a pipe organ that looked like it was more for show than for actual use.

"Church Office" the sign on the door read. "Please press the white button."

14 / Ransacked

Saundra pressed the buzzer but heard nothing in response. After waiting a minute, she pressed it again, harder this time. Still nothing. She shifted her weight and bit her lip, the cherry-flavored lip balm sparking against her tongue. This was concerning. Unlike last time, there was no ping sound nor a cheery secretary asking, "Who is it?" Henry had specifically told her that he would be in his office all morning long on Wednesday.

Saundra pressed the buzzer once more. When she again got nothing in response, she sighed, sat down on the front pew, and scribbled a note to leave behind. No sooner had she slipped the note through the mail receptacle on the office door and turned to walk away that the thought occurred to her to try opening the door. She turned around and grasped the shiny brass knob. To her surprise, the door swung open. What's the use of a buzzer if the door is unlocked?

Saundra took one step into the airy hallway. All the lights were on and everything was perfectly quiet.

"Hello?" she called, her voice ringing out eerily against the silence. "It's Saundra Boone from Hancock Press."

There was no response.

"Rector McAllen?"

Still nothing.

"Hello?"

Unless everybody had suddenly left in a hurry, Saundra sensed something was wrong. After kicking the plastic door stopper underneath the door, she proceeded down the hallway. An entrance to the baptismal pool, a couple of office doors, and several classroom doors lined either side of the long hall. She remembered that Henry's office was four doors down to the right. "Pastor's Office" the sign on the door read.

Saundra tried the doorknob. It, too, swung open easily.

What she saw made her stand still in shock.

The large desk in the middle of the room was covered in papers that had been dumped out indiscriminately and spilled onto the floor. The desk drawers were standing open, their contents strewn about as though someone had rifled through them. The metal filing cabinet, which had locks on each of the drawers, had been broken into somehow, and its contents had been treated like garbage based on the way green and yellow filing folders were thrown about the carpet. A chair had been turned over, and the desk lamp lay on the floor. A desktop computer also lay on the floor, its casing tossed aside. A quick glance revealed that the hard drive had been ripped out.

"What on earth?" Saundra sucked in her breath and put her hand against her head. Someone had been looking for something here. Surely, Henry would not have left his office in disarray. And where was he anyway?

Saundra knew she'd have to call the police. Henry could be in danger. But first she snapped a few pictures of the ransacked office and recorded a short video of the damage on her iPhone.

As she turned to leave, Saundra spied a familiar device on the corner of the desk — Henry's cell phone — an older Windows Phone model. She remembered joking him about not having a more modern device. Now, it sat perfectly aligned on the very corner of the desk. It seemed out of place, incongruous when compared with the rest of the ransacked office — as though someone had placed it there on purpose, wanting her, or Henry, or someone else to find it.

A light on the phone screen flashed.

Impulsively, Saundra picked up the phone. She hurried out of the church.

15 / Designs

Melanie Dunn observed the command console of the new warship with a critical eye.

"The captain can log in with a password to control the ship from a number of different places on board," Dustin Molinova was saying. "And that's only if he has to."

"If he has to?" Melanie queried. Of course, she already knew the answer. After all, she had to fight Congress to keep the money in the Defense Department's budget for this third-generation Zumwalt warship to be built.

"Yeah," Dustin said, rubbing his hand over his grizzled lower jaw as he squinted at the tiny view-port that showed the dark waters of the shipyard. "It's like a slow cooker — just set the course and forget it, you know." He glanced sideways at Melanie as he laughed at his own joke. "I'm not going to get even a smile out of you today, am I?" he said in a low tone.

"What else is new?" Melanie said as she turned away from the console and climbed up the stairs to the deck.

"Nothing that you don't already know about," said Dustin as he followed stopping his cowboy boots loudly on each metal step making the whole staircase vibrate. Melanie refused to hold on to the railing. "This ship can be handled by half the number of crew members required for other ships this size. The automated weapons system can lock on a target and fire on its own. The Zumwalts are not just any ship, they're a real member of the military unit. Almost autonomous." He paused and glanced over his shoulder at about a dozen of his workers milling around on deck waiting for the inspection to finish. "Now, don't we have other things to talk about?"

"I will tell you when I'm ready to talk about other things," Melanie said as she cut her cold blue eyes at him. "What about radar?"

"Radar works just like the Navy requested in the work order. This ship will show up on enemy detection systems like a small fishing boat — good for getting your enemy to underestimate you or not pay attention to you at all," Dustin said. "When is the commissioning?"

"Two months," said Melanie, "and you're not invited."

Dustin pretended to scowl as he turned to his workers. "All right, guys, some people's over. Clear out." He waved his hands over his head as his inspection headed below deck to tie up loose ends and the rest boarded the inflatable boats to head back to shore.

Melanie walked to the bow of the warship and looked out over the railing. Gray clouds swam across the sky, blocking out the sun, and casting everything in a dull glow.

"So, he found the book?" Dustin said from behind her.

"What?" said Melanie without turning around. She wondered how Dustin knew.

"You know what I'm talking about," Dustin said. "Your brother, Nehemiah, found that book your dad was talking about."

"What's that to you?" said Melanie. She placed her hands on the cold steel of the railing. The dark waters below showed a warped reflection of her and Dustin standing side-by-side. Dustin was studying her intensely; she turned and faced him.

"I worked in the mines with your dad years ago; he talked about it then," Dustin said. "Some old book that was supposed to be the key to a lost part of American history."

"It was supposed to be a secret," Melanie said.

"I know. He told me in private. Don't think he told anyone else."

"And how did you find out? Nehemiah has it now?"

"That's for me to know," Dustin said. He hooked his thumbs in his belt. Melanie just nodded. "I bet he doesn't know what to do with it," Dustin said smugly.

Melanie looked away remembering that Nehemiah had been unsure if he even wanted to keep the old artifact.

Dustin leaned forward. "He's in over his head. That little episode with the gunmen at the lighthouse was just a taste of things to come. You don't know what they've planned." Dustin pounded his fist into his palm in front of Melanie's chest.

Melanie tried to prevent the confusion from clouding her face as she pushed Dustin's arms away. "Wait. What who has planned?" she said.

Dustin pointed his finger and waved it in her face. "I've got my finger on them," he said. "I'm watching them, but I can't tell you who they are just yet."

"Why not?"

"Because," Dustin shrugged and stuck his thumbs back in his belt. "I'm not assured of your loyalty."

"My loyalty? Loyalty to what?" Melanie normally did not get easily frustrated, but Dustin had a way of getting under her skin. And he seemed to enjoy doing it.

"To the cause," Dustin said spreading his arms wide. "To America — the greatest cause there is." Melanie just shook her head as Dustin let his arms fall back to his side. "Look," he said seriously. "We can arrange this thing. I'll just go and take the book. Get it to Nehemiah's hands. Get it to your hands if you want. He doesn't have to know it's me or even that you're in on it."

"No!" Melanie said sharply. The steely edge returned to her voice. "You will not go near my brother."

Dustin held up his hands and took a step back. "Easy, there, Madam Secretary. You make it sound like I suggested killing him."

Melanie decided she would have to find a way to get surveillance on Dustin. Just because the Navy contracted with his company to help build warships didn't mean he wasn't engaged in shady activity elsewhere.

"I mean it, Dustin," she said. "Until you tell me what you're up to, this stays between you and me. Understand?"

"Fine," said Dustin. "But you've got another thing coming if you think you can force me into telling you stuff. I don't want to tell right now. Some things are best kept secret for now." He raised his hands and spread his fingers wide two inches from her face. "Big things are happening, Madam Secretary."

She glared at him and folded her arms across her chest.

He turned and walked away across the deck.

"I will be watching you very closely," Melanie called after him.

Dustin laughed and snatched up the cowboy hat that was sitting on the railing. He put it on. "I've got designs on you, Melanie. I've got my eye on you, too," he called over his shoulder.